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CHILDREN IN SUDAN

Slaves, Street Children and Child Soldiers

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Human Rights Watch/Africa

Human Rights Watch/Africa was established in 1988 to monitor and promote the observance of internationally recognized human rights in sub-Saharan Africa. Janet Fleischman is the Washington director; Alex Vines is the research associate; Kimberly Mazyck is the associate; Alison DesForges, Bronwen Manby, Binaifer Nowrojee and Michele Wagner are consultants. William Carmichael is the chair of the advisory committee and Alice Brown is the vice chair.

Human Rights Watch Children's Rights Project

Human Rights Watch Children's Rights Project was established in 1994 to monitor and promote the human rights of children around the world. Lois Whitman is the director and Mina Samuels is a consultant.

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Ms. Rone conducted the research for the report with Human Rights Watch Leonard H. Sandler Fellow Brian Owsley during a mission to Khartoum, Sudan, from May 1-June 13, 1995, at the invitation of the Sudanese government. Interviews in Khartoum with nongovernment people and agencies were conducted in private, as agreed with the government before the mission began. The private individuals and groups, however, requested anonymity because of fear of government reprisals, and took great precautions in meeting with us. Interviews in Juba, the largest town in the south, were not private and were controlled by Sudan Security, which terminated the visit before testimony regarding most abuses, including rebel abuses, could be gathered in that town.

Ms. Rone conducted further research in Kenya and southern Sudan from March 5-20, 1995.

GLOSSARY

Dawa Islamiya Islamic Call, a large Islamic nongovernmental organization that engages in relief work in over fifteen African countries

ICRC International Committee of the Red Cross

ILO International Labor Organization

JCC Juvenile Care Council, a Sudanese organization with government and nongovernment members which operates state facilities for street children

jihad Holy war (or great struggle or effort, in Islam)

mujahedeen Holy warriors or participants in *jihad*

murahiliin Arab tribal militias

National Service The agency within the Ministry of Defense responsible for conscripting men who under law are obliged to serve one or two years in the armed forces.

NGO Nongovernmental organization

NIF National Islamic Front, the militant Islamic political party that came to power in 1989 after a military coup overthrew the elected government

Nuba The African people living in south Kordofan's Nuba Mountains in Central Sudan; some are Muslims, some Christians, and some practice traditional African religions

OLS Operation Lifeline Sudan, a joint United Nations/NGO relief operation for internally displaced and famine and war victims in Sudan that began operations in 1989. It serves territory controlled by the government and by the SPLA. Much of its work in southern Sudan is throughcross-border operations conducted by OLS Southern Sector based in Nairobi.

PDF Popular Defense Force, a government-sponsored militia. Its training program is designed to produce *mujahedeen* to participate in *jihad*.

SPLM/A Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army. The Sudanese rebel movement and army formed in 1983 headed by Commander-in-Chief Dr. John Garang de Mabior. In 1991 a faction split off from the SPLA in protest of Garang's leadership. The Garang or the mainstream group was known thereafter as SPLA-Torit, after its headquarters in Eastern Equatoria, until that town fell to the government in July 1992. It was also known as SPLA-Mainstream, and now as SPLA.

SSIM/A Southern Sudan Independence Movement/Army. This is the faction of the SPLA, led by Cmdr. Riek Machar Terry Dhurgon, that broke away from the SPLM/A and Dr. John Garang's leadership in August 1991. It was based in Nasir, Upper Nile and for a time was known as "SPLA-Nasir." On March 27, 1993, others joined it and it was renamed "SPLA-United." In November 1994 it was renamed Southern Sudan Independence Movement/Army.

Triple A camps Displaced persons camps in Ame, Aswa and Atepi, on the East Bank of the Nile in Eastern Equatoria south of Juba, created in 1992 and evacuated in 1994 due to government military advances. These three camps housed up to 100,000 displaced southerners.

TNA Transitional National Assembly, Sudan's legislative branch, whose members are appointed by the president

UNHCR United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNICEF United Nations Children's Fund

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SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Serious abuses of children's rights continue in Sudan, Africa's largest country, six years after a military coup overthrew the elected civilian government on June 30, 1989, and brought to power a military regime dominated by the National Islamic Front (NIF), a militant Islamist party. The civil war that commenced in 1983 has continued. The rebel Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) seeks a united secular Sudan and autonomy, if not separation, for the African peoples living in the southern third of the country and the Nuba Mountains. The NIF government regards the war as a "holy war" for Islam and its soldiers as "holy warriors," even where the conscripts asked to wage such a war are non-Muslims.

The war has produced an enormous displacement of peoples living in the south and in the Nuba Mountains in central Sudan. More than two million have been displaced to areas of the north, far from the conflict zones, where their African traditions clash with the strict application of Islamic law by the NIF and their religious beliefs are not respected by the Islamic state. Khartoum, the capital city of this country of about 25 million people, now has a population of over four million, and almost half are people displaced by the war.

The children of Sudan, north and south, have been denied their basic rights by all parties to the conflict, and by the government of Sudan even in areas such as Khartoum where there is no war. Many who are considered street children, mostly southerners and Nuba, are removed from their families without notice. They are denied their right to identity when they are given new Arab names and denied their right to freedom of religion when they are subjected to forcible conversion; the government's recent family reunification project may mitigate some damage done to these children.

Some children have been captured in military raids on their villages and taken into household slavery by their captors. Dinka and Nuba children have predominated among those seized and exploited in this way. The government denies the existence of the problem and has made no effort to stop the practice or to punish those who treat Sudanese children as slaves. In addition, underage boys are forcibly recruited into the army or government-sponsored militias, while at the same time the government attempts to focus world attention on the SPLA's use of child soldiers.

The SPLA and SSIA continue to recruit underage soldiers while at the same time the SSIA cooperates with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) family reunification program.

Arbitrary Arrest and Detention of Street Children

Since 1992 the government has engaged in a campaign of "cleaning up" city streets by rounding up alleged street children and sending them to special, closed camps. Many alleged street children were not street children at all, but were actually living with their families, and were captured while they were running errands such as going to market. These children were, nevertheless, packed off to the closed camps, without any government effort to find out if the child had a family, where it was, and what if any problem caused the child to be out on the street. Thus children have been separated for years and many remain separated from their families.

There are at least three basic human rights problems with the Sudan government's program for street children: 1) the government arbitrarily removes the children from their families without any legal process and holds them in camps for years, usually without notifying their families. Families search for their missing children without any help from authorities; 2) the government does not respect the religious freedom of the children in that it gives them an Islamic religious education whether or not they or their families are Muslims; and 3) the government violates the children's right to their own identity, including their name, when it gives some children new names in Arabic and denies their heritage. These practices, which have been going on for years, violate the United Nations (U.N.) Convention on the Rights of the Child, the African Charter, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Human Rights Watch does not object to social programs to help street children, or to control petty crime. The existence of street children and the problems they face (and that some may cause), however, are not excuses for arbitrary detention and denial of due process, the breakup of families, and the confinement of children in closed camps. These abuses reflect a lack of concern for the individual child that is inconsistent with effective social work, and they violate international law. Moreover, some camps may have been used to warehouse underage boys for military service: one fifteen-year-old boy told Human Rights Watch that he and others were given an option of joining the army or remaining in a camp indefinitely. This warehousing practice is strikingly similar to the practice of the rebel SPLA that the government has long denounced.

While continuing to seize children off the streets of Khartoum, the government has recently undertaken an internationally-funded pilot project designed to reunite children in the camps with their families. This family reunification pilot project took place in Dar Bacha'er (Home of the Future) Home for Girls in Omdurman in 1994, in cooperation with UNICEF, Oxfam/UK and Radda Barnen (Swedish Save the Children). The program involved social work to locate the child's family, investigate its circumstances and the causes of vagrancy, often poverty, and included a project to help the families generate an income. All involved regarded the pilot project as a success.

The government says it intends to expand the program to include the main boys' camp at Abu Doum, the largest of its closed camps, with about 650 boys. While the program could help set right the abuse of unjustly separating these children from their families, it will not make up for the years they spent apart from their families, in substandard facilities, denied the nurture of their kin and the recognition of their own identity, religion, and culture. Nor will it make up for the substantial amount of time and money that families have invested in searching for, and only sometimes finding, their lost children. The first concerns, however, are to institute the return of the children to their families, following upon the project already begun in the girls' camp, and to halt further arbitrary detentions on the past pattern.

Children Kidnaped From Their Parents and Subjected to Slavery or Forced Labor

Many southern and Nuba children have been captured and taken from their families during military raids on their villages by Arab militias and soldiers in the war zones. They are kept for use as unpaid household servants. The soldiers and militia members sometimes take these children with them when they return to their homes in western and northern Sudan, where the children continue to do unpaid labor inside the house or herding animals, on threat of beatings. There have been cases of sexual abuse of these children. There are reports that some are sold.

Army officers, soldiers, militia members, and others operate with total impunity from government prosecution, although their conduct violates laws against kidnaping and forced labor. The Sudan government has failed to live up to its obligations to prevent and punish such abuses under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the 1926 Slavery Convention as amended, the 1956 Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the 1930 International Labor Organization (ILO) Forced Labor Convention (No. 29) concerning Forced or Compulsory Labor, the 1957 ILO Convention (No. 105) concerning the Abolition of Forced Labor, the African Charter, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

The cases we found were of children who were located by their families, or who succeeded in escaping. The families had to undertake the search themselves, with governmental assistance only where they chanced upon southerners among the police officers they met in their search.

It is clear that existing legal remedies are not adequate to promptly free all of the stolen children. While in some cases described below legal procedures (administrative or judicial) eventually led to reunification of the child with his or her family, the legal route is costly and often fruitless.

The government of Sudan flatly denies all allegations of slavery and forced labor. These topics have been under consideration by the ILO, the U.N. Committee on the Rights of Children, the U.N. Commission on Human Rights, and the U.N. Working Group on Contemporary Forms of Slavery for years. The government, however, has never requested the technical assistance and advice that these agencies have suggested could be used to pay urgent and due regard to reports of slavery and forced labor. Nor has the government taken any legislative or administrative steps to regulate child labor performed in households or herding animals, nor has it ratified the ILO Minimum Age Convention.

Military Recruitment for the National Service of Underage Boys and Violation of their Freedom of Religion and that of Captured Young SPLA Soldiers

Underage children have been drafted as soldiers and into government-sponsored tribal militias, in violation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and of Sudanese law, which provides that only men eighteen years of age and older may be conscripted.¹ The right of non-Muslim child conscripts to freedom of conscience and religion is violated during the training period when military trainers instruct and train them as "holy warriors" and refer to the conflict as an Islamic "holy war" against the south. The way in which religious studies are introduced in training recruits subjects the young conscripts to coercion that would impair their freedom to have a religion of their own choice. Nor are the non-Muslim recruits given an equal opportunity to manifest or practice their religion on the same basis as the Muslim conscripts.

In early 1995 there was widespread military conscription of young men involving a range of abuses, including the drafting of underage boys. Army officials, helped by members of the government's paramilitary Popular Defense Forces, set up checkpoints throughout the Khartoum area, and among others rounded up children as young as twelve. The street children's camps became a convenient reservoir from which to draw army conscripts. Recruitment efforts were not limited to the north. The army also forcibly drafted southerners in garrison towns to fight against their fellow southerners in the SPLA.

In 1992 the government of Sudan captured nineteen young SPLA soldiers who were too sick to be evacuated from Pochalla when it fell to the government. It took them to Khartoum for a brutal regime of forced Islamization, failing to respect the freedom of religion of these children.

Southern Sudan

The SPLA has long had a policy of separating boys from their homes and families for military training (and some education). Thousands of boys went to the Ethiopian refugee camps hoping for an education and received mostly military training. The SPLA inducted boys as young as eleven into its ranks.² With the sudden return of Sudanese refugees to Sudan when the Ethiopian government fell in May 1991, thousands of boys, who had been separated from their families but were not yet incorporated into the SPLA, arrived in southern Sudan. In 1993 UNICEF began a project to reunify willing boys with their willing families. This received the partial cooperation of the SPLA faction commanded by Riek Machar Terry Dhurgon, now called the Southern Sudan Independence Movement/Army (SSIM/A).

The SPLA never cooperated with UNICEF's family reunification program, preferring to keep the boys together under their thumb close to SPLA military facilities, and to call them up when needed. Thus boys in "unaccompanied minors" schools in Eastern Equatoria were called up in 1994 and 1995, as the SPLA continued to recruit minors. The SPLA denies child recruitment.

Although the SSIA cooperated with the UNICEF family reunification effort, unfortunately the faction did not stop underage recruitment. They lured hundreds of boys from their homes in Upper Nile to go hundreds of kilometers south to Eastern Equatoria, on the pretext that they would get schooling there. Instead they received military training at the base of Cmdr. William Nyuon, then a commander in the SSIA.

The boys received little food and no medical attention, however. As their condition worsened Cmdr. Nyuon sent them to the nearest U.N. relief site, Lafon, for medical aid and food; forty-seven boys died from malnutrition and illness in Lafon from July to December 1994. Among other things, SSIA soldiers stole their food rations. Subsequently the SSIA cooperated in a UNICEF family reunification program that airlifted hundreds of boys from Lafon back to their homes in Upper Nile.

Recommendations to the Government of Sudan:

- continue with the family reunification program for street children held in camps;
- proceed to a total phase-out of the camps by stopping "collection" and random capture of children from the streets, reunifying with their families children presently in the camps, and assuming responsibility for homeless children and those whose families could not be traced through an adequate and acceptable welfare program which respects freedom of religion;
- investigate the allegations of ill-treatment of street children in the camps and punish those responsible;
- stop detaining street children unless they are suspected of committing a crime under the juvenile code and then are tried promptly with full due process rights, including notice to their families; alternatives to incarceration should be provided where feasible;
- continue to seek other, less drastic remedies for the problems of street children, that are consistent with the Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- ratify the African Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- take steps to put an immediate end to the abuse and capture of children during army and militia raids and their subsequent use as forced child labor in slavery-like conditions, including ordering a halt to the capture or arbitrary detention of children and other civilians in war zones;
- investigate and prosecute all reports of the kidnaping of civilians, especially children, in particular where this occurs during military actions carried out by governmental forces or their allies;
- investigate all reports of children held as servants or laborers, paid or unpaid, and all reports of physical or sexual abuse of these children, and prosecute those found responsible;
- investigate and prosecute officials and police officers who fail to enforce the criminal laws regarding child abuse, kidnaping, slavery, or forced or child labor, and consider increasing the penalties for those convicted of such failures to perform their duties;
- publicize such investigations and prosecutions as a means of deterrence;
- pass legislation outlawing unpaid employment of non-family members of whatever age;
- ratify the ILO Minimum Age Convention of 1973 (No. 138);
- prevent transportation by adults of unrelated children from state to state without appropriate authorization. Where the adult is of a different ethnic background from the child, the circumstances of such transport should be closely scrutinized;
- cooperate fully with the U.N. Committee on the Rights of the Child, the ILO, UNICEF, the U.N. Working Group on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, and the U.N. Commission on Human Rights' Special Rapporteur on Sudan in their investigations of the reported slavery-like abuses;

- request international cooperation, particularly technical assistance and advice, to pay urgent and due regard to reports of slavery and forced labor;
- refrain from using children under the age of eighteen as combatants, as that minimum age is provided for in Sudanese law, or in any capacity in military or militia structures, and prevent them from participating in such activities;
- respect the freedom of conscience and religion of all military conscripts or volunteers by exempting all those who wish to be exempted from religious studies and religiously-oriented military exercises, slogans, and activities; and
- provide safe land and air access for the provision of humanitarian aid to the children of Sudan throughout the national territory and without regard to who currently controls the territory.

Recommendations to the SPLM/A and SSIM/A:

- facilitate voluntary family reunification;
- cease all recruitment of children under the age of eighteen, including recruitment disguised as education;
- refrain from using children under the age of eighteen as combatants or in any capacity in military or militia structures, and prevent them from participating in such activities.

Recommendations to UNICEF, the ILO, the UNHCR, and others:

- UNICEF and the ILO should establish and fund programs to effectively promote the adoption of national legislation and implementing programs to ban child labor and slavery.
- Human Rights Watch recommends that UNICEF, the U.N. Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Working Group on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, the U.N. Commission on Human Rights' Special Rapporteur on Sudan, and the ILO monitor the application of the slavery and forced labor conventions to Sudan, and that all send fact-finding missions to investigate the reported abuses and the mechanisms the government is employing to confront the problem.
- conduct voluntary family reunification; where small groups of minors are separated from the larger tribe, efforts should be made to reunite them in the safest location, even if that means reuniting them outside Sudan or from one country of refuge to another.

Recommendation to the U.S., members of the European Union, and other concerned countries:

- pressure all parties to the conflict to improve their human rights performance by: 1) ceasing to use children under age eighteen as combatants or in any capacity in military or militia structures, and preventing them from participating in the conflict; 2) facilitating relief access and voluntary family reunification; and 3) supporting measures in international forums and in Sudan to effectively end child labor and slavery.

PART I

ABUSES BY THE

GOVERNMENT OF SUDAN

2

STREET CHILDREN

The Applicable Law

Due Process

The Sudan government has had a program of capturing children from city streets and sending them to closed street children's camps. It has conducted this program for the most part without any effort to identify the child's family, its whereabouts, and if the child is living with his family. The result has been that many children, who left home only to run an errand, have been held for years in these closed camps, while their families frantically have searched for them.

The government separates the alleged "street children" from their families without notice or any judicial oversight. The children are placed in camps run by the state, for indeterminate periods that last years, without recourse to any legislation such as the Juvenile Welfare Act of 1983.³ The Juvenile Care Council (JCC) is the state agency, under the state welfare ministries, that runs these camps. This entire process grossly violates the Convention on the Rights of the Child,⁴ which provides in Article 9 (1) that:

States Parties shall ensure that a child shall not be separated from his or her parents against their will, except when competent authorities subject to judicial review determine, in accordance with applicable law and procedures, that such separation is necessary for the best interest of the child. . . .

The African Charter also protects the child within the family unit.⁵

The U.N. Human Rights Commission's Special Rapporteur has identified this as "a case of arbitrary arrest and detention without due process of law."⁶ We agree.

In the case of boys, the state does not make any effort to identify the parents or relatives, according to the boys.⁷ Government authorities from police to camp administrators simply do not ask for information about relatives, and, what is worse, reject it if it is offered. Even a street children's camp employee of Dawa Islamiya, whom the guards selected for us to interview, was originally summarily interned in a camp although he told the police he had a job and lived with his aunt. This boy, now age eighteen, is a Muslim from the Nuba Mountains. A summary of his testimony follows:

Three years ago, in May 1992 when he was fifteen, he was picked up by the police when he was out on the street after work. The police accused him of being a vagrant. He believes this was because he was wearing dirty clothes. He told the police that he had a family and a job, "But they did not listen to me," he said. He had a job as a ticket collector on the buses in Khartoum. His family lived in Jebel Aulia, an official displaced persons camp some forty kilometers south of Khartoum, and he stayed with his aunt in Khartoum.

They sent him to the camp at El Fau where he remained until June 1993 when that camp was "finished," or closed and its boys sent to Soba. He did not have any contact with his family at all when he was in El Fau, and they had no idea what had happened to him.⁸

It appears that this one-way street to the closed camp is so well known in the poor communities from which the "street children" are plucked that some boys give false names, intending to escape.

In the sole facility for girls, the Dar Bacha'er Home for Girls, the parents were sometimes contacted but even then they and the girls had few rights. Parents and girls are subjected to arbitrary procedures in which there is no opportunity for the courts to check the whims of any camp administrator. The JCC admitted that no court has jurisdiction over the camp or how the girls arrive at and are held in the home: "The court had nothing to do with them."⁹ Thus, even after the pilot family reunification program was conducted at Dar Bacha'er, the home was no model of due process.

A JCC official explained that after 1 a.m. nightly, the Public Order Police (*an nizam al amm*) tour the city. These police who bring in the girls are not the regular police; they belong to a special branch of the police that "takes care of beggars, street children, thieves, crazy people." If they find girls on the street, in houses of prostitution, or with alcohol, they bring them to this facility.

They affirmed that the staff investigates the family background of the girls. If the family wants the girl back and the officials disagree, then it is the practice to require a male relative to submit a written guarantee that he will take care of the girl. The mother may also take responsibility for the girl, they added when questioned. It was clear during our interview of the gathered staff members that the procedures are extremely loose and arbitrary. It is unclear which agency has ultimate authority, if any does. Apparently the more assertive families go to the police and the JCC and ask them to write letters authorizing the release of the girl. Either these agencies or the camp authorities may require a guarantee from a relative.

If the girl is found on the street a second time, the camp will not release her again and she will be kept there for two years, all without any judicial proceedings. Other staff members verified that they have never had to go to court to get a judge's approval to remove a girl from her family: "The courts do not interfere." One social work assistant who had worked at the home for three years said there were perhaps forty such cases of girls who returned to the street after such an undertaking.

Asked whether there had ever been any case of disagreement between the authorities and a girl's family, two of the social work assistants said that if the family feels strongly about it, they would give the girl back. "There is no specific law on this."

Since due process is lacking even where the parents are contacted, mere parental notification will not suffice. The camps must be closed.

Religious Freedom

No governmental official to whom we spoke officially defends violation of the religious freedom of the children, nor insists that the state has the right to convert children from their own religion to Islam. Officials simply deny that such violations exist.

The efforts to force children in these camps to convert and to practice Islam are well documented and pervasive, however. Our investigations confirmed what others have found.¹⁰ Here also, the practice is simply not to ask the child if he has a religion and what it is, but to treat him as a Muslim or a clean slate on which to imprint a religion. One government official asked us what was wrong with teaching Islam to children. When we pointed out that if the child already had another religion, this could be a violation of religious freedom, the official had no answer. ¹¹

We do not doubt that many state officials genuinely feel they are acting in the best interests of the child by giving him

or her a religious Islamic education. Nevertheless, in probably the majority of cases, they are violating the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 14:

1. States Parties shall respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.
2. States Parties shall respect the rights and duties of the parents and, when applicable, legal guardians, to provide direction to the child in the exercise of his or her right in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child.
3. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.

They are also violating the religious freedom provisions of the African Charter¹² and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.¹³

At Dar Bacha'er Home for girls, the staff admitted that they did not ask the religion of the girls during the intake process or afterwards. When asked how they knew the girls' religion, they said that, as to the Christian girls, the staff "heard them singing church songs."

The staff denied that they gave any religious instruction to the girls.

This was flatly contradicted by the girls we interviewed privately. One thirteen-year-old girl whom the staff chose for us to interview had participated in the family reunification program and had returned for the day to visit. She had been in the home for more than two years. According to her, the daily routine included Islamic prayers five times a day, in which everyone participated, even the southern and Christian girls. First they got up and prayed in the mosque, cleaned the room, queued up and went to school, prayed, had lunch, rested, and prayed at sunset.

In the afternoon they sometimes played sports and prayed beforehand. In the evening they had Koran readings and study in which all girls participated. They would watch television and have evening prayers before they went to bed.

Her family, from the Nuba Mountains, is Muslim but some girls in the camp are Christian and they still had to join in the same prayers, she said. An eight-year-old girl said that at school all girls study the same subjects: religion (the Koran), Arabic, and math.

The religious regime for the boys was similar.

Right to Preserve Identity

Many children are given new names in Arabic to replace their Christian or southern tribal names that often identify the place of origin or tribe of the child. This violates the right of the child, protected by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, "to preserve his or her identity, including nationality, name and family relations as recognized by law without unlawful interference."¹⁴

The Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes that a child temporarily deprived of his or her family environment shall be entitled to special protection and assistance provided by the state. This could include *Kafala*¹⁵ of Islamic law, but all protection and assistance must be given with "due regard . . . paid to the child's ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background."¹⁶

There is no regard whatsoever paid to the child's ethnic, religious, cultural or linguistic background in the camps for street children; as far as we can determine, there is not even any inquiry made into these subjects. On the contrary, it appears that the staff makes an effort to avoid knowing anything about the child's prior identity. They simply treat all children as Muslims and Arabs, although the majority of the children are southerners and were neither Muslims nor Arabs before they were summarily interned in the camps.¹⁷

This was clearest in the case of one confused eight-year-old we interviewed at the Soba camp for street boys, whose testimony is summarized below.

This small boy had an Arabic name, Mahmoud (not his real Arabic name).¹⁸ Since he looked southern, we asked his father's name. It was John (a Christian name). His mother's name was Rosa (not a Muslim name). Mahmoud said he himself had another name when he was young and living with his family, but he does not remember it. The authorities gave him the name Mahmoud when they took him to the first boys' camp.

He told us his tribe was Dinka; his mother is Dinka and his father is from the Nuba Mountains. His mother is a Muslim and his father a Christian, he said.¹⁹

When they captured him, he was about six years old. He was living with his family in Port Sudan; he has one brother and one sister. His father sent him to get food from the market. The police caught him en route to the market and he never saw his family again. They took him to El Fau camp and later to Soba camp.

We asked if he told the police that he had a family. He spoke softly: "They did not give me a chance to speak. The police put me in the car and took me to the camp."

No one ever asked him where he came from, where his parents were, what were their names, and what, if anything, was their religion.

Background

In 1987, during the democratically-elected government, several different NGOs undertook projects to address the problem of street children. They included Amal (Hope), Sabah (Morning), Sudan Popular Committee for Relief and Rehabilitation, St. Vincent De Paul (which worked with southern children in Khartoum), and the African Society for Mother and Child Care, a subgroup of Dawa Islamiya (Islamic Call, a large Islamic NGO that works in more than fifteen African countries).

A pamphlet issued by the Sudanese Juvenile Care Organization²⁰ in 1989 spells out some ideological reasons driving Islamists' interest in street children: it explains that child vagrancy has led to the "domination of the left over street children, since it exploits them in sabotage by talking to them about class differences."

After the 1989 military coup and takeover of government power by the National Islamic Front, an Islamist political party that ran a poor third in 1986 national elections, the rules of the game were changed. The Ministry of Social Welfare in 1991 instituted strict new regulations, purportedly on quality control grounds, that had the effect of prohibiting all NGOs from running residency programs for street children. It made other programs targeted at street children by non-Islamic NGOs very difficult, until the recent family reunification pilot project in which UNICEF and two international NGOs took an important role.

Beginning in September 1992, Khartoum State authorities undertook to "cleanse" the city of street children, considered

a threat to public order and a blight on the capital. Police and city authorities began routinely rounding up vagrant children by night from places where they slept, such as in the markets, and taking them to camps outside the capital and in other states.

In its submission to the U.N. Committee on the Rights of the Child in 1993, the Sudan government said that there were 23,931 homeless children in Sudan (64.97 percent of them "partly" homeless). It said that three major foster and family rehabilitation centers in Khartoum, Kosti (Central Province), and Geneina (Darfur) were "ready to take in homeless, orphaned and other similar groups of children." The Home of the Future (Dar Bacha'er) for girls was ready to take up to 300 girls.²¹

The street children camps are now under the jurisdiction of the federal Ministry of Social Planning and the state welfare authorities. The Juvenile Care Council, which in Khartoum is an agency under the Minister of Social Welfare for Khartoum State, administers them.²² Food in at least some camps is provided by the international nongovernmental organization Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) and *zakat*²³ provides resources also.

The JCC consists of representatives of the Ministry of Social Welfare, the Zakat Chamber and nongovernment organizations. The director of Social Welfare for Khartoum State was the General Secretary of the JCC for more than two years, followed by one and a half years in his current post.²⁴

Only St. Vincent de Paul of all NGOs now continues a residency program for street children; officially its program was dissolved in 1994 but it was permitted to continue these activities because there was no other place to place the 150 southern children it was feeding, housing and educating in some seven homes in Khartoum. Its administrator, who was also the director of a breakfast program for more than eighty schools in slum areas in greater Khartoum, was arrested in April 1994 and held for ten days with three Egyptian seminarists, volunteers in the breakfast program, who were suspected of espionage. None was charged with a crime. Sudan Security withheld the vehicle in which they were arrested, which reportedly was carrying a large amount of money in cash, apparently the salaries of teachers in the schools covered by the program. The money and the vehicle were not returned, and the administrator filed a complaint in November to recuperate both. It was in reprisal for this action that he was apparently beaten by a security agent from Sudan Security's department of church activities (*an shitta al kanasiya*) in charge of the case. Ultimately the Commissioner of Voluntary Agencies (COVA), the Ministry of Social Planning agency with jurisdiction over national and international NGOs, suspended the registration of Saint Vincent de Paul.

The years-old practice of seizing children from the street, without notice to their parents, has led to a subculture of relatives and others who search for missing children and advise and help each other.²⁵ Their efforts are not always successful, or are successful only after crucial years in a young child's life have been spent in harsh camp conditions, deprived of all contact with his or her family. The testimony of one father is summarized below.²⁶

Marial (not his real name) migrated to Khartoum with his family in 1983, before the war in the south was "serious." He is a Dinka from Rumbek, and a Christian. In about 1990, when his son, Michael (not his real name), was about ten or eleven, Marial sent Michael to the market in Omdurman to run an errand. The son disappeared. Marial did not find his son for three years. He finally found Michael in a camp for street boys perhaps fifty kilometers north of Khartoum, which may have been Abu Doum, although Marial, who is illiterate, did not remember the name of the camp. His story is typical of the efforts to which parents go to find their "street" children; his story, unlike many others, had a happy ending.

Here, the father was helped by the fact that there were many southern parents in the Khartoum area searching for their disappeared or kidnaped children, although without any help from the authorities. One group of searchers found this camp one morning's drive by car north of Khartoum. In this camp there were at least 150 children, all boys.

The searchers managed to talk privately to some of the "black-looking boys." The adults, who were from Omdurman, asked where the boys came from. Marial's son Michael volunteered his real name as well as the false name he had given to the authorities [some boys give false names, hoping to escape], and said he too was from Omdurman.

Another Rumbek parent whose son also was taken to a camp helped Marial. This man told Marial where to go to get the papers necessary to free his son from the camp. Those who operated the camp are "an Islamic group that has an office in Khartoum," but the father forgets the name. He gathered documents from this and a variety of other offices.

When Marial arrived at the camp, his son recognized him and ran to him, with another boy, a relative. His son told him that when he was captured at the Omdurman market the police just threw him into a car. They did not ask any questions or give him a chance to say who he was and where his parents were. When finally asked his name, he gave them a false one.

When Marial presented the documents to the camp officials, they at first refused to release the boy. Marial insisted that he wanted his son back so he could send him to school. The camp officials told him they took his son and the other children because "the way that they were living in town was degrading to Sudan, bad for foreigners to see them living in garbage." They had to take the boys out of town. In the camp, the officials said, the children were living better than in the streets. They were in a proper place, and had people taking care of them.

These officials finally released the son, however. In all the son spent three years, from age ten to thirteen, illegally separated from his family.

Facilities

Abu Doum Camp for Boys

Currently the largest facility for street children is the Abu Doum camp north of Omdurman, where as of June 1995 about 650 boys lived, according to the Director of Social Welfare of Khartoum State. It has housed up to 1,000 boys.²⁷ Reportedly some 200-300 boys were picked up from the streets of Khartoum around December 1994 and taken there. This was the last large roundup as of May 1995, although such roundups have been conducted periodically ever since the program began in 1992.²⁸

The Abu Doum camp is close to a military base and military checkpoints, making access without a government guide impossible. Because the road is very bad, it takes about two hours in an all-terrain vehicle to reach the camp from Khartoum, according to state authorities. The vast majority of the boys in this camp, according to people who have visited, are originally from the south and west of Sudan, although they were picked up mostly in Khartoum.

The authorities justify the inconvenient location of this camp on the grounds that it removes the boys from the bad influences in Khartoum, where they could leave rehabilitation homes and purchase and inhale benzene and engage in other undesirable activities. In addition, the authorities admit that boys escaped from these Khartoum homes.

While Ministry of Social Planning officials say that the Abu Doum boys go to elementary school in the local village, visit their families, and receive visits from their families, we were not able to verify this.²⁹ Other human rights monitors have reported that the families of the boys do not visit them since the families are not informed that the children were placed in the camp in the first place.

In the case of Marial, referred to above, Marial made a few observations about the camp where he found his son (which

was probably Abu Doum Camp):

Marial noticed that the boys in the camp were all ages: younger and older than his son, to judge by their heights. All the boys in this camp were "black," he said.

In the camp, according to his son, they were taught how to weave with their hands and feet, producing a *tagiya* or skullcap. They did not wear this skullcap.

His son also told him that their Islamic training consisted of prayers starting at 4 a.m., and going on from there for the required five prayers a day. There were no Christian prayers or services in the camp, no church, and no priests or ministers visiting. All boys were required to participate in Islamic rites, whatever their religion. The son told him that he had not received military training, however.

Marial observed a big fence all around the camp. Inside this compound were small huts with thatched roofs (papyrus), no zinc, no bricks. He saw where the boys slept: the accommodations were "all right." There were eight to ten beds in each room.

The boys, however, were constantly running away. Some escaped but others were caught. His son did not try to escape because he was "too young."

The camp officials used to lash the boys, and would make some boys lash the others. All the boys were thin and looked fragile, he assumed because of the beatings; their health did not look good. His son knew one boy who died in the camp; he was ill and the authorities tried to give him medical treatment but he died anyway.³⁰

Soba Camp for Boys

The Soba camp houses about eighty boys, ages seven through seventeen, according to the guards, who said it has a capacity for one hundred boys. We observed that the majority of boys were not yet adolescents and these young boys looked like southerners.

Although the Minister of Social Planning and Minister of Social Welfare for Khartoum State, which runs the camp through the JCC, told us that Soba was a temporary reception home where boys stayed for seven to ten days on average,³¹ the guards said that some boys had been there for two years, and many had been there for six or seven months. Soba was not listed as a homeless children's facility by the government in its submission in June 1993 to the U.N. Committee on the Rights of the Child.

The Soba camp was opened a few years ago, closed, then reopened two years ago, the guards said, apparently when camps in other states were closed due to funding problems. It is located close to the African Islamic University in Khartoum, tucked behind other social welfare institutes such as the African Center for Mother and Child Care run by Dawa Islamiya, and is not marked.

We visited the camp without a government escort because we had been told by the government before the mission started that we could move freely in Sudan without an escort, and visit anywhere we wanted. We hoped to receive more candid comments from camp officials and children if we visited without a prior appointment. There were only guards present when we visited Soba on May 9, 1995, but they consented to our visit and even to some private interviews with the boys before changing their minds.

The religious training was obvious upon our arrival at about 1:15 p.m.; they told us all the boys and staff were at their midday Islamic prayers. We had to wait while they finished. After a few minutes, they emerged from the prayer area. Many were young southern boys and some still had sand on their foreheads from where they had bowed down. When we spoke to a group of them apart from the guards, they said they were all required to say Islamic prayers five times a day. They identified themselves as from Dinka, Shilluk, Nuer, Azande, and other southern tribes, and said their families did not raise them as Muslims.

The guards told us that the boys, mostly from the south, were Muslim and Christian although the "great majority are Muslim," we were assured.

The Soba camp is not, like Abu Doum is and El Fau was, a closed camp. Indeed, its Khartoum location would make it hard to prevent boys from escaping. Some boys said that Soba was better than the El Fau camp because El Fau was a closed camp, and no one could go in or out. In El Fau, however, one added, the food was better than in Soba. Other boys said that staying at the Soba camp was preferable to being exposed to police harassment on the streets of Khartoum; most boys were very far from their families since their internment in these camps, and have no where else to go.

We privately interviewed two older boys (one a camp employee) the guards chose for us and two younger boys we chose. We began to interview a thirteen-year-old boy we had chosen, who identified himself as a member of a southern tribe from Juba. Three guards then entered the room and were very rude, insisting we had talked to enough boys. "One is enough. You are not writing a book. They all will say the same thing. We treat them all the same way. The boys do not remember well. Why do you want to talk to them in private? We know what you want to ask. [They did not spell this out.] The boys are frightened that they will be called to talk to you." The visit was terminated.

The remarks of the guards, however, suggested that they feared that the boys might talk about ill-treatment at this facility.

Testimonies from Soba

The testimonies of two boys we interviewed privately are summarized below:

Musa (not his real name), who gave his age as eight, said he was from the Tamawi tribe, from western Sudan. His family was living in Ombada in Omdurman, but the police caught him on the streets of Khartoum, where he was spending most of his time. This happened "a long time ago." He was first sent to a camp in Port Sudan (about 1,190 kilometers from Omdurman).³² This camp was "very bad." Sometimes they did not get water, sometimes they did not get food. After a year in Port Sudan they moved him to the El Fau camp, where there was enough food at first. Then conditions in El Fau worsened and they moved him and the rest of the boys to Soba.

He told the police when they picked him up that he had a family, but they did not listen to him. He has not seen his parents or siblings since the police took him away. When he told us how many brothers and sisters he had, two sisters and five brothers, his eyes began to tear.

One fifteen-year-old boy, Hussein (not his real name), whom the guards selected to talk to us, was a runaway who now wants to go home but cannot. At age twelve he left his home in Geneina, Darfur, near the Chadian border, because he did not want to go to school. He jumped a train in Nyalla, Darfur, and the police caught him on the train in Kosti. The police took him to the El Fau camp for a year and then they sent him to Soba two years ago, in 1993.

He emphasized that he would like to go home very much. He misses his parents. He has two brothers and three sisters

also, but has had no contact at all with his family for three years. He does not have the money for the fare home, however. He was ashamed that he does not have any decent clothes, only two ragged shirts and pants.

We asked if he told the camp authorities that he wanted to return home; he had, but they said they did not have enough money for his fare. It came out later in the interview, however, that they did manage to transport him and fifty-four other boys from the Soba camp to El Muglad in mid-1994. There they presented the boys with the option of joining the army or returning to the Soba camp. They provided free military transport to and from El Muglad, which is quite a distance from Khartoum, about 1,050 kilometers.

Although he completed a metalworking course (making window grating and beds) and received a certificate,³³ he could find work only as a bus ticket collector in Khartoum in early 1995. Like so many young men, however, he was afraid of forced recruitment; his bus route passed inside Khartoum, where "the soldiers catch all the boys and put them in camps for training and take them to the south to fight." He had no identification to show his age, fifteen, three years below the official draft age, so he quit his job rather than risk the draft. He could not find other work to pay for his ticket home.

Dar Bacha'er Home for Girls

The only camp for girls is Dar Bacha'er Home, in Omdurman, which is run by the JCC under the Minister of Social Welfare for Khartoum State. At the beginnin